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SUBJECT: SENEGAL: Youth Shot Dead by Military During Demonstration

SUMMARY

[¶1.](#) (SBU) On December 23, 21-year-old Mamdaou Sinna Sidibe was shot dead by military personnel during a violent demonstration to protest against the poor living conditions and the lack of jobs in the mineral rich region of Kedougou in southeastern Senegal. Mr. Sidibe was a metal worker heading to work and was caught in the demonstration. Enraged citizens then attacked and burned every government building in the town of Kedougou itself as well as destroying several vehicles and looting 10 Kalashnikovs from a Gendarmerie post. Another man was killed later that evening during an attack at his store. 34 people have so far been arrested and police are still looking for the youths that stole the weapons from the Gendarmerie. According to local informants in the area, calm has now been restored following a major crackdown by the military, although the situation remains tense. End Summary

Locals Protest Lack of Access to Gold Mining

[¶2.](#) (SBU) The protestors were demonstrating against the unavailability of jobs in the mining sector, especially in small-scale artisanal mining, where they say concessions have been given to non-locals and foreigners. Furthermore, many of those active in these mining operations hail from neighboring countries such as Mali and Guinea. Other complaints include the signing of opaque contracts between the government and the mining companies, the fact that government revenues from mining operations have not been recycled back to local communities and the inattentiveness of the government to all of the aforementioned concerns. According to prominent Senegalese NGO Raddho's leader in Kedougou, Mor Khouma, local students discovered that a social welfare fund paid into by mining companies to build schools, wells, provide micro finance credit and vocational training to young people so that they can be employed in the mining sector has some 3.5 billion CFA that has so far remain unused.

Escalation

[¶3.](#) (SBU) Khouma told Embassy that the demonstration was meant to be peaceful. He went onto say that the demonstration was the idea of Cheikh Anta Diop University students from the region of Kedougou who wanted to protest the aforementioned lack of infrastructure development. They thus prepared a memo for the regional governor and then proceeded to go to his office to deliver the memo. Upon seeing such a large crowd approaching the governor's office, the authorities panicked and the military was called in for crowd control. The RADDHO representative said that security forces started firing indiscriminately and that Mr. Sidibe was killed instantly with a shot to the head.

Government Steps In

[¶4.](#) (SBU) Following the riots and the death of Mr. Sidibe, government spokesperson Abdou Aziz Sow claimed that the victim had been

trampled to death as demonstrators were attempting to flee the scene. However, an autopsy report confirmed that Mr. Sidibe had been shot in the head as was initially reported. According to RADDHO, a crackdown is now in effect and people are being arbitrarily arrested and beaten. Over the weekend the government sent down a high-level delegation lead by Interior Minister Cheikh Tidiane Sy along with Minister of Defense Becaye Diop and the head of the Gendarmerie, General Abdoulaye Fall. Note: The head of the Gendarmerie has the same name as the chief of staff of the armed forces. The two are not related. End note. In a statement, Minister Sy said that he thought that this was not a spontaneous act, rather, the youths had planned the violence.

Comment

15. (SBU) This kind of shooting is unusual in Senegal where security forces - military and police - are known for their restraint and discipline. During riots, police tend to use tear gas and truncheons to disperse crowds. Hopefully, this shooting will remain the isolated event that it appears to be. As for the protestors, their arguments have some merit. When President Abdoulaye Wade announced the reopening of the Sabodala gold mining plant he said that it "would end unemployment in Kedougou." However, according to a wide variety of reports both in the media and in discussions with local contacts, the only people that seem to have benefited from this mineral windfall are those who enjoy the patronage of the President and his entourage. Added to this is the fact that land is being sold off to developers and that young children are employed in informal artisanal mining operations to sort gold dust from soil by using highly toxic mercury. End comment.

SMITH